

(iv) Information on the priority order of enrollment categories and subcategories for funding contracts;

(v) Specific information on the level of funding that NRCS estimates will go toward stewardship, existing practice, and enhancement payments;

(vi) An estimate of the total funds NRCS expects to obligate under new contracts during a given sign-up, and an estimate for the number of enrollment categories and contracts NRCS expects to be able to fund; and

(vii) The schedule for the sign-up process, including the deadline(s) for applying.

(2) NRCS will accept applications according to the timeframes specified in the sign-up notice.

(d) *Selection of contracts.* (1) NRCS will determine whether the application meets the eligibility criteria, and will place applications into an enrollment category and subcategory based on the criteria specified in the sign-up notice and into a Tier based on the criteria in 1469.5(e). Enrollment categories will be funded in the order designated in the sign-up notice until the available funding is exhausted. NRCS will determine the number of categories that can be funded in accordance with the sign-up notice, and will inform the applicant of its determinations.

(2) NRCS will develop a conservation stewardship contract for the selected applications. If the contract falls within the enrollment categories and subcategories funded in the given sign-up, NRCS will make payments as described in the contract in return for the implementation and/or maintenance of a specified level of conservation treatment on all or part of the agricultural operation.

**§ 1469.7 Benchmark condition inventory and conservation stewardship plan.**

(a) The benchmark condition inventory and associated case file information must include:

(1) A map, aerial photograph, or overlay that delineates the entire agricultural operation, including land use and acreage;

(2) A description of the applicant's production system(s) on the agricultural operation to be enrolled;

(3) The existing conservation practices and resource concerns, problems, and opportunities on the operation;

(4) Other information needed to document existing conservation treatment and activities, such as, grazing management, nutrient management, pest management, and irrigation water management plans;

(5) A description of the significant resource concerns and other resource concerns that the applicant is willing to address in their contract through the adoption of new conservation practices and measures; and,

(6) A list of enhancements that the applicant may be willing to undertake as part of their contract.

(b) *Conservation stewardship plan.* (1) The conservation stewardship plan and associated case file information must include:

(i) To the extent practicable, a quantitative and qualitative description of the conservation and environmental benefits that the conservation stewardship contract will achieve;

(ii) A plan map showing the acreage to be enrolled in CSP;

(iii) A verified benchmark condition inventory as described in § 1469.7(a);

(iv) A description of the significant resource concerns and other resource concerns to be addressed in the contract through the adoption of new conservation measures;

(v) A description and implementation schedule of—

(A) Individual conservation practices and measures to be maintained during the contract, consistent with the requirements for the tier(s) of participation and the relevant resource concerns and with the requirements of the sign-up,

(B) Individual conservation practices and measures to be installed during the contract, consistent with the requirements for the tier(s) of participation and the relevant resource concerns,

(C) Eligible enhancement activities as selected by the applicant and approved by NRCS, and

(D) A schedule for transitioning to higher tier(s) of participation, if applicable;

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(vi) A description of the conservation activities that is required for a contract to include a transition to a higher tier of participation;

(vii) Information that will enable evaluation of the effectiveness of the plan in achieving its environmental objectives; and

(viii) Other information determined appropriate by NRCS and described to the applicant.

(2) The conservation stewardship plan may be developed with assistance from NRCS or NRCS-certified Technical Service Providers.

(3) All additional conservation practices in the conservation stewardship plan for which new practice payments will be provided must be carried out in accordance with the applicable NRCS FOTG.

### § 1469.8 Conservation practices and activities.

(a) *Conservation practice and activity selection.* (1) The Chief will provide a list of structural and land management practices and activities eligible for each CSP payment component. If the Chief's designee provides the list, it will be approved by the Director of the Financial Assistance Programs Division of NRCS. When determining the lists of practices and activities and their associated rates, the Chief will consider:

(i) The cost and potential conservation benefits;

(ii) The degree of treatment of significant resource concerns;

(iii) The number of resource concerns the practice or activity will address;

(iv) Locally available technology;

(v) New and emerging conservation technology;

(vi) Ability to address the resource concern based on site specific conditions; and,

(vii) The need for cost-share assistance for specific practices and activities to help producers achieve higher management intensity levels or to advance in tiers of eligibility.

(2) To address unique resource conditions in a State or region, the Chief may make additional conservation practices, measures, and enhancement activities eligible that are not included

in the national list of eligible CSP practices.

(3) NRCS will make the list of eligible practices and activities and their individual payment rates available to the public.

(b) NRCS will consider the qualified practices and activities in its computation of CSP payments except as provided for in paragraph (d) of this section.

(c) NRCS will not make new practice payments for a conservation practice the producer has applied prior to application to the program.

(d) New practice payments will not be made to a participant who has implemented or initiated the implementation of a conservation practice prior to approval of the contract, unless a waiver was granted by the State Conservationist or the Designated Conservationist prior to the installation of the practice.

(e) Where new technologies or conservation practices that show high potential for optimizing environmental benefits are available, NRCS may approve interim conservation practice standards and financial assistance for pilot work to evaluate and assess the performance, efficacy, and effectiveness of the technology or conservation practices.

(f) NRCS will set the minimum level of treatment within land management practices at the national level; however, the State Conservationist may supplement specific criteria to meet localized conditions within the State or areas.

### § 1469.9 Technical assistance.

(a) NRCS may use the services of NRCS-approved or certified Technical Service Providers in performing its responsibilities for technical assistance.

(b) Technical assistance may include, but is not limited to: Assisting applicants during sign-up, processing and assessing applications, assisting the participant in developing the conservation stewardship plan; conservation practice survey, layout, design, installation, and certification; information, education, and training for producers; and quality assurance activities.